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7 October 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

SUBJECT: Abolition of the Office of Special Activities - Pros and Cons

1. This memorandum is for your information.

2. In connection with FY 1965 budget and manpower limitations, it has been suggested that CIA withdraw voluntarily from the entire National Reconnaissance Program, and that the assignments of the Office of Special Activities be transferred to the United States Air Force.

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3. Such an action would reduce the CIA manning table

By doing so, we would save only [redacted] in FY 1965, since all of the developmental and operational programs are now funded in the Air Force (NRO) budget. This elimination would reduce DD/S&T by [redacted] and eliminate our residual substantive influence on the reconnaissance program.

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4. However, the tragedy in such an elimination would be a national one. The Intelligence Community now depends on satellite and aircraft photography for the majority of its raw intelligence on the Soviet-Sino Bloc. Two systems have produced all of this photography to date - the U-2 and CORONA - both products of the Office of Special Activities and its predecessor, the Development Projects Division. These two systems also provide an unusual amount of hard intelligence on the uncommitted and semi-friendly world. Were it not for an in-house CIA developmental and operational capability, albeit strongly supported by the Air Force, there is real question in everyone's mind whether we would now have either of these priceless national assets.

5. The U-2 flew higher and farther and took pictures because intelligence was its only mission. Likewise, the CORONA succeeded and was gradually improved because national intelligence was its only mission. On the other hand, intelligence will always rank fourth or fifth on

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OSD REVIEW COMPLETED

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NRO and USAF review(s) completed.

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the Air Force priority list, as compared with strategic and tactical warfare, not to mention military space. This is as it should be, but it does not presage a dramatic change in Air Force policy.

6. The essential fact in evidence is that CIA (Office of Special Activities) has demonstrated by performance an ability to identify, pursue and operate reconnaissance programs which provide the majority of our national intelligence. I submit that they do so because they are in the intelligence business. The OSA represents the only proven group in the Government - or at least outside the Air Force - which can carry a development program through from conception to operation. Continuity of civilian personnel in the organization and CIA flexibility in bringing outstanding non-Government people into participation on a meaningful basis are major reasons for this record. The argument that this activity is a parasitic one is handily abolished by OXCART which is leading both DOD and civilian (SST) supersonic aircraft by a wide margin. This capability has been painfully developed over the past ten years and now represents a major national resource. It is not a resource to be brokered away lightly.

7. The transfer of the assignments of OSA to the Air Force would do little to enhance their capabilities and would assure no greater control of the NRP for the Intelligence Community. Neither is it a factor in influencing the NRO, for its role has been progressively reduced from that of a wife to a domestic. Rather, it would remove the one pacing group from the reconnaissance field. By executive decision, manned overflights of denied territory have been carried out only by the CIA since 1956 so as to assure maximum secrecy and permit plausible denial. To transfer this function to the Air Force should be made a matter of Presidential decision.

8. It is not clear that the operational role played by OSA, especially in the U-2 program, could be effectively handled by the Air Force.

intelligence activities is already strained. It is not clear that adequate secure Air Force communications exist to existing and planned bases. Certainly, there is question in my mind whether an Air Force U-2 program could or would exploit the opportunities offered by U.S. Navy carrier platforms.

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[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] CIA security influence over the entire National Reconnaissance Program would certainly diminish if the structure of security controls were transferred to the Air Force.

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10. The basic argument against abandoning OSA to the Air Force is not a bureaucratic one. Rather, it is that OSA represents a unique national asset: an experienced, integrated organization with a demonstrated capability for developing and operating reconnaissance systems which produce intelligence data upon which this country has come to rely. Until that record is matched, I submit that we can find better opportunities to save [REDACTED] somewhere else in the Federal Government.

(Signed)
ALBERT D. WHEELON
Deputy Director
(Science and Technology)

cc: DDCI
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Deputy to DCI/NIPE

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